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Understanding the Determinants of Students' Choice of Occupancy for Creative Construction

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Abstract

Opportunities for creativity and innovation are always factors that need to be considered when it comes to student accommodation since students are clients in any form of accommodation provided. The study was undertaken to evaluate the factors that affect students' choice of occupancy in privately owned residences in a South African higher education institution as well as provide insight to housing providers on what factors to give attention to and improve. Students always look for residences that are within a walking distance to campus, meaning it should be close to campus, secure, within a friendly environment or location and have unlimited internet service for academic reasons. The study used primary data obtained through the survey method with the use of structured close-ended questionnaires which were distributed to students living in a privately owned residence. Convenience sampling was used with 55 questionnaires distributed and 50 were returned and worthy to be analysed. Literature was used to obtain factors that were utilised for data collection. Overall, student housing providers including private housing providers should take caution on the factors that affect students choice of occupancy in privately owned residences, thus consider what influences and attracts students to stay in privately owned residences and implement creative and innovative initiatives to better the residences. This study will help accommodation providers (existing and new developments) to enhance residences, attract more occupants without compromising their needs.

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1. Introduction

Leaving the home behind and living in student residence, for a long period of time, is a totally different experience for most fresh students. This new way of living provides a chance to learn and figure out how to live self-reliantly or independently, compromise with other students, roommates and share facilities. When a student enters into a college far away from home, he/she has to adapt to a new environment with a whole new life experience and lifestyle [14]. Meaning, students will have to face unexpected changes and challenges on a daily basis be it good or bad.

Some studies done of student accommodations in the United States have revealed that students have turned out to be more demanding about the quality and convenience of their accommodation and are constantly searching for access to a variety of facilities such as computer labs, laundry rooms and gymnasiums [11].

Researchers have provided evidence that recommends that being accommodated in a harmless, safe, well-managed residence is both socially and academically advantageous for students, specifically for students who come from poor backgrounds and are first year (freshman) students. Such environments for them can be very overwhelming as they are vulnerable at this stage and have not yet adapted to the environment. Decent, affordable and well maintained student accommodation thus permits students to pay attention on their academic activities, which helps improve the chances of academic success [5].

According to a study done by the Sheffield City Council [13] on student accommodation students who are normally studying their second year and beyond usually prefer renting a private house, this because it gives the students a real experience of independence where they have a responsibility of arranging their payment of bills and ensuring that their property is clean.

2. Occupancy Influencing Factors

Student residences play a critical part in students experience on college campuses. Residence environments can influence students' feeling of comfort, connectedness, and acknowledgement [8]. Kolawole and Boluwatife [10] state that environmental conditions promote meaningful tertiary experience and that there is a correlation between living accommodation and the academic performance of students. The living situations that Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) students experience vary due to the diversity of housing options and environments available.

The high demand for student residences increases annually in many HEIs. This demand comes with a lot challenges and preferences from different students. Environmental factors have been classified as the main factors that occupants use to assess the housing provided. According to the UK Essays [14] an environment includes all the living and non- living things that happen naturally on earth. It further explains that the student residence environments play an important part in providing accommodation and if the environment is not good or pleasing then the occupants (students) consider other options. Every individual have their own definition of a hostel or student residence, and if the environment of the residence is decent and meets the expectations then the student can without difficulty embrace it and have a sense of a home.

An environment creates a feeling of security and belonging, therefore the neighbourhood and environmental attributes are perceived key when selecting the choice of occupancy or when determining the level of satisfaction of occupants. Delvin [6] mentions that some students prefer off-campus (privately owned) residences than on-campus residences due to lack of privacy, noise level as well as having to share bed space. Delvin [6] further states that some students choose privately owned residences considered they are affordable, decent and close to campus with adequate facilities and mostly offer privacy.

Muslim et.al [12] states that, any living environment can be observed from different angels, such as architectural details, economic position as well as social and cultural perspectives. The physical environment is seen as the strongest predictor of residential satisfaction which does influence choice of occupancy for if the environment attracts occupants (students) then it is more likely for students to occupy the residence. Khozaei [8] recognised some predictors of student residence satisfaction, which are: cleanliness of the housing; safety of the housing including security measures; hall programme and activities provided while residing there; and prospects to provide input into decision-making in the residence hall in other words being able to have a say in some of the activities and rules

made in the housing. Some physical factors which consist of the internal and external environment of the building include:

- Room size
- Security
- Gym Facility
- Location
- Internet access
- Study areas
- Laundry room
- Water supply

These factors do influence students' choice of occupancy. Students are always looking for accommodation in which they expect their needs and expectations to be met. The size of room in any residence does determine if any individual will reside there. The size of the room does matter since occupants mainly students require rooms that are spacious, well ventilated and not cramped. Security in any student accommodation is a priority and students would like to be assured that they are safe especially when residing in a privately owned residence. A gymnasium in a student accommodation is one attribute that attracts students and excites them mostly if there will not be any extra expenses meaning it will be free for occupants (students) living there. A major factor that also affects choice of occupancy of students is the location in which the residence will be at. Students want to be in a residence that is close to school, there is availability of public transport and the neighbourhood is conducive for effective learning.

The satisfaction of residences is not only for the occupants (students) but also for their visitors, as well as members of the public, who have business in the building. Therefore correct student residence conditions are key factors for personal wellbeing and performance in every way. This is because the way a building functions when it is used is essential for both owners and occupants whether or not it is regarded as a success and constitutes an asset [3]. Thus we can deduce that factors that influence choice of occupancy also influence satisfaction in the long run. Opportunities for creativity and innovation are always factors that need to be considered when it comes to student accommodation since students are clients in any form of accommodation provided and their needs have to be catered for.

2.1 On-Campus residences

When students move to residences, their parents normally look for surety that their children are in a safe environment that is well maintained and very conducive for the purpose of studying. In the end every student have their own preference when it comes to residences, either on-campus or off-campus.

Government Gazette [7] defines on-campus accommodation as “units for accommodation within the university premises, which can differ from big blocks of rooms which are similar to residence halls, to multiple bedrooms that accommodate students”.

Studies on the impact of on-campus living satisfaction on student accommodation according to Muslim et al [12] has constantly shown that students' chances of graduating are greatly impacted by living on campus and having a positive living and learning experience throughout their learning life span. Student on-campus housing is not just shelter, but comprises of environmental aspects and social activities that are sympathetic to academic success [1]. There are lot of advantages of residing within the campus as one has access to all the facilities such as computer labs, the library and study areas in the campus and does not necessarily have to worry of rushing back home e.g. students who do not live in the on-campus residences always have to rush back home and find it challenging to complete school work as there is no Wi-Fi connection or any internet services nearby or access to the library. The benefits of living on-campus are limitless and it is clear to a lot of students that the availability and being able to have access to on-campus residence is of great importance. Khozaei et al [9] state that living in on-campus residences is connected to better safety and sense of security compared to off-campus housing.

2.2 Off-Campus privately owned residences

Government Gazette [7] defines off-campus accommodation or privately owned housing as “privately owned housing units which can differ from big blocks of rooms similar to residence halls, to multiple bedroom houses that

accommodate only students, through to single rooms in houses occupied by the home owner. This includes a housing facility leased by the university directly with a landlord or indirectly through an accredited leasing agent”.

There are students who like private accommodation (off-campus) better than on-campus accommodation. According to Khozaei et al [8] lack of privacy, noise and unavailability of spacious rooms can be considered as stressful conditions which drive students away from on-campus to off-campus accommodation. Often these stressful conditions provoke students to move from on-campus to off-campus residences (privately owned residences) due to the fact that it has exceeded their level of tolerance. It has become widely accepted that students prefer to live off-campus, as it offers them more independence [8].

Another reason why students may prefer private accommodation may be that such housing offers the students similar experiences to their homes. A lot of studies have shown that students might be attracted in living within the campus (on-campus) if the student housing can meet their various needs.

3. Research methodology

The data or information used in this paper was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained through the survey method with use of structured close-ended questionnaires, while the secondary data was derived from the review of literature from accredited scholars and researchers in South Africa and internationally on the study undertaken. With the use of a quantitative approach, questionnaires were distributed to a total of 55 students (occupants) residing at Saratoga Village student residence in Johannesburg South Africa at the City of Johannesburg municipality in Doornfontein and only 50 were returned resulting to a 91% response. The targeted respondents were students from first-year to final year, also students who are currently doing their experiential training and post graduate studies.

The questionnaire was divided into sections whereby the first section covered the background information of the respondents while the second section focused on factors that influence students' choice of occupancy in privately owned residences. A cover letter was provided which highlighted the main purpose of the study and to assure respondents that participation is voluntary and not forced. The questionnaire also had standard instructions on how to complete it. To determine the factors that affect students' choice of occupancy in privately owned residences, an agreement 5-point Likert scale was adopted. The scale read as follows: 1=Strongly Disagree (SD); 2=Disagree (D); 3=Neutral (N); 4=Agree (A); and 5=Strongly Agree (SA). The 5-point scale was converted to mean item score (MIS) in which the MIS were calculated from the total of all weighted responses and then related to the total responses of the specific aspect. The following formula explains how the MIS was computed.

$$MIS = \frac{1n1 + 2n2 + 3n3 + 4n4 + 5n5}{\Sigma N} \quad (1)$$

Whereby;

n1 = Number of respondents for factor number 1;

n2 = Number of respondents for factor number 2;

n3 = Number of respondents for factor number 3;

n4 = Number of respondents for factor number 4;

n5 = Number of respondents for factor number 5;

N = Total number of respondents

The criteria were then ranked in descending order, meaning from the highest to the lowest MIS.

4. Findings and discussion

Table 4.1 represents responses on the factors that affected the choice of occupancy of the respondents. Factors with the same MIS were given the same ranking but the one with the least SD was considered to be first. Based on the respondents, the females measured the location of the residence as the major factor that affects choice of occupancy with MIS=4.227 and SD=0.869 while the males viewed the factor mixed residence as an important factor with MIS=3.964 and SD=0.999 but the general view of both genders viewed the location of the residence as the most important factor with MIS=4.020 and SD=0.937. Delvin [6] also supported by UK Essays [14] noted that an

environment is a key attribute that students consider when selecting the choice of occupancy which the results of the study revealed that it is important. The level of security was ranked second by both females and males with MIS=4.091 and SD=0.868, MIS=3.857 and SD=0.891 respectively. The proximity to campus is also among the most important factor that affects students choice of occupancy as both females and males ranked it second with MIS=4.091 and SD=1.231; MIS=3.857 and SD=0.848 respectively. This shows that the students are in accord when it comes to being close to school. This confirms the study done by Delvin [6] that students consider privately owned residences when they are close to campus. The availability of laundry rooms was ranked third by females with MIS=3.909 and SD=1.065 and the males ranked it seventh with MIS=3.286 and SD=1.272 and the overall view of both genders ranked it sixth with MIS=3.560 and SD=1.215. A secure parking was ranked fourth by both females and males with MIS=3.864 and SD=0.889, MIS=3.464 and SD=1.138 respectively while the overall view of both genders ranked it fifth with MIS=3.640 and SD=1.045, meaning it is seen as an important factor. The gymnasium was ranked eighth by both females and males with MIS=3.682 and SD=1.041, MIS=3.250 and SD=1.110 respectively which does contribute as an important factor in choice of occupancy. This confirms what was mentioned by Macintyre [11] that students are constantly searching for access to a variety of facilities which gymnasiums are included.

Table 4.1: Factors affecting choice of occupancy

Occupancy Factors	Female			Male			General		
	MIS	SD	RANK	MIS	SD	RANK	MIS	SD	RANK
Location of the residence	4.227	0.869	1	3.857	0.970	2	4.020	0.937	1
Level of security	4.091	0.868	2	3.857	0.891	2	3.960	0.880	2
Proximity to campus	4.091	1.231	2	3.857	0.848	2	3.960	1.029	3
Availability of laundry rooms	3.909	1.065	3	3.286	1.272	7	3.560	1.215	6
Internet service	3.909	1.151	3	3.214	1.618	9	3.520	1.460	8
Secure parking	3.864	0.889	4	3.464	1.138	4	3.640	1.045	5
Architectural design	3.864	1.125	4	3.750	1.236	3	3.800	1.178	4
Computer labs	3.818	0.853	5	3.321	1.188	6	3.540	1.073	7
New development	3.773	0.813	6	3.357	1.026	5	3.540	0.952	7
Unavailability of on-campus res	3.727	1.453	7	3.036	1.105	11	3.340	1.303	10
Mixed residence	3.727	1.120	7	3.964	0.999	1	3.860	1.050	3
Gymnasium	3.682	1.041	8	3.250	1.110	8	3.440	1.091	9
In-house canteen	3.500	1.058	9	2.571	0.997	14	2.980	1.116	14
Word of mouth recommendation	3.409	1.182	10	3.214	1.031	9	3.300	1.093	11
Study rooms	3.364	0.953	11	3.179	1.278	10	3.260	1.140	12
Affordability of the residence	3.091	1.306	12	2.679	1.219	13	2.860	1.262	15
Number of occupants in a unit	3.091	1.192	12	2.929	1.303	12	3.000	1.245	13
Room size	2.818	1.259	13	2.571	1.136	14	2.680	1.186	17
Swimming pool	2.773	1.152	14	2.679	1.188	13	2.720	1.161	16

Based on the results of the study the number of occupants in a unit with MIS=3.000 and SD=1.245 is also an important factor. This factor is also important to females with MIS=3.091 and SD=1.192 but it is not so important to males as it had a MIS=2.929 and SD=1.303 meaning the females prefer more privacy than males. Khozaei [8] mentioned that students move from on-campus residences to off-campus privately owned residences due to the fact that there is lack of privacy. The room size was seen as the least important factor by both females and males with

MIS=2.818 and SD=1.259 and MIS=2.571 and SD=1.136 respectively. Both genders are in accord when it comes to the swimming pool that it not an important factor in determining choice of occupancy as the overall view had a MIS=2.70 and SD=1.161 while the females and males had a MIS=2.773 and SD1.152 and MIS=2.679 and SD=1.188 respectively.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

This study has highlighted factors that affect students' choice of occupancy in privately owned residences. Literature review revealed that the environment, facilities such as computer labs; laundry rooms; and gymnasiums are factors that affect students' choice of occupancy. This also includes the affordability of the residence, privacy, proximity to campus, and decency were factors provided by literature as determining factors.

The study revealed that the location of the residence; level of security; proximity to campus; availability of laundry rooms; internet service; secure parking; the architectural design; computer labs; unavailability of on-campus residence; mixed residence; gymnasium; word of mouth recommendation; study rooms; and the number of occupants in a unit were among the vital factors that affect students' choice of occupancy in privately owned residences. In this regard, off-campus privately owned residences should consider the above mentioned factors as main points in which they should focus on when accommodating and planning to accommodate students. . The results of this study will benefit developers as well as on-campus and off-campus residence providers. This will help them to improve their facilities to cater for students and mostly ensure that the needs of the students are met. This will aid improvement in students' satisfaction with residences and propels more innovation and initiatives to better housing facilities for better student life and academic success which calls for creative construction.

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